

VZCZCXRO0887
PP RUEHPA
DE RUEHUJA #0984 1591637
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 081637Z JUN 09 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6212
INFO RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS PRIORITY 1457
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0363
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 1947
RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE 0904
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

C O N F I D E N T I A L ABUJA 000984

CONFIDENTIAL
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/W, INR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/26/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: Yar'Adua Worrisome Physical Appearance during GE meeting

Classified By: Ambassador Robin Renee Sanders for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C)Before the May 28 signing ceremony of General Electric's (GE) first Country-to-Company Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Government of Nigeria (GON), the Ambassador had a personal opportunity to observe Nigeria President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua for 40 minutes as he struggled physically to present his views on GE's MOU on infrastructure development and investment. This session was followed by the Ambassador's brief one-on-one exchange with him following the GE meeting and presentation of the MOU. Of note, there was not only an extreme deterioration in the President's physical appearance, but certainly a marked air of nervousness by his handlers who sat around the table watching Yar'Adua struggle with his speech and delivery.

¶2. (C)It is important to strongly note, however, that the President was coherent in his remarks, had command of the issues, and was also able to express what he hoped the outcome would be from the GE country-to-company agreement. What Yar'Adua had problems with was what appeared to be his breathing, swallowing, and taking longer than his usual pedantic delivery style in speaking. Members of his cabinet looked on with worried expressions as at times Yar'Adua had to stop a lot to swallow. Also, his well known involuntary cough seemed not only to be more pronounced, but a lot more frequent than before. The assembled GON team present included the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, the Attorney General, both the Minister and Minister of State for Power, the Principal Secretary of the Villa, and the new head of Villa Protocol - all leaned forward and were on the edges of their seats every time Yar'Adua took more than a comfortable pause between words or thoughts as he explained his positive views of GE's MOU.

¶3. (C)After the formal session with GE, the Ambassador had a stand-up face-to-face with the Nigerian President and the following is her take on his appearance after the close-up discussion. He was extremely emaciated, and did not appear to weigh more than 150 pounds; touching his hand during the long exchange was like touching a skeleton; his skin was paper thin and fragile, his eyes were deep set and the spark from before was gone, his teeth were very blackened; and, he spoke barely above a whisper.

¶4. (C)Comment: Although we are surprised given the various reports of Yar'Adua's health issues ranging from renal failure and lung cancer, he is still here. We do not know all of the President's

ailments, but certainly his illnesses clearly are taking their toll on him as he appears very physically weak. However, he is by no means incoherent in any way. This bears repeating, the President was not/not mentally incoherent even though he stopped often to swallow, seemed to have trouble breathing, and his involuntary coughing appears to have markedly increased. What we do know is that his workday remains limited, despite some reports that he is up and about more hours than he was in September-December 2008 time periods when we had the last big medical scares on his health. But even more important and worrisome is that it seems as long as he hangs on (and past predictions of his imminent demise in February 2009 have not borne fruit), his slow leadership style continues to paralyze the GON as we move closer to 2011 and get more into the already burgeoning campaign season. Post is sending in a "Whither 2011 Election" cable as a septel with various scenarios on the 2011 Run-up that includes Yar'Adua's health issues and its implications for Nigeria in the short and medium term.

SANDERS